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THE WHIP-POOR-WILL AS NAMED IN
AMERICAN LANGUAGES.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.



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The quaint and unobtrusive note of the little whip-poor-will bird has attracted the people's attention more than the voice of most other birds. It is heard mainly in the evening, after sunset, when all animate nature is going to rest for the night; but also at daybreak and during the early hours of the day, before the darting rays of the sun have gained their full power.* The bird is confined to the two American continents, but the genus of the goat-suckers or Caprimulgidæ, to which it belongs, is common to other parts of the world as well. There are different species of the whip-poor-will, which were discussed at length in a scientific and interesting article by Dr. R. W. Shufeldt, entitled, "Night-hawks and Whip-poor-wills," in *Popular Science Monthly* of New York, January, 1894, pp. 308-313. Some of his statements were made use of by the present writer. Another comprehensive article on the subject will be found in the "Century Dictionary of the English Language."

The two best-known species of the whip-poor-will are *Antrostomus carolinensis* and *Antrostomus vociferus*, which is smaller by one third than the *A. carolinensis*. Some of the Indian languages accurately distinguish between the two; the Creek or Maskoki of the Gulf States, *e. g.*, call the former tchukpilápila and the latter wakúla. The Caprimulgidæ or Aigotheles genus, in English goat-suckers, is improperly called so after the absurd popular story that goat-suckers are sucking the teats of goats and other pasturing animals, and thus rob them of their milk.

Naturalists differ in the naming of the various kinds of whip-poor-wills, and so does the popular mind of this and other countries. The note of the bird is queer enough to inspire various suggestive names, and *all of these* are *onomatopoetic*, as are also the names coming from illiterate nations. The voice of the bird is also alluded to by poets, and a collector of all the verses and poems addressed to it in the languages of civilized nations could soon fill a large album with extracts from books and cuttings from newspapers.

An' cattle bells is ringin',
An' whip-poor-wills is singin',
An' golden apples swingin',
An' lots of them to spare!

—From a poem on "Fall Time."

An orchid growing in Southern New Jersey, *Cypripedium*

* They are usually heard early in the morning and from 4 to 9 P. M.



acaule, or lady's slipper, is called by the Jersey farmers, *whip-poor-will shoe*.

The time of the year when the whip-poor-will is heard has prompted farmers to formulate certain rules for the field operations they have to perform at that period. Thus we find that: "The Delaware Indians observe when the white oak puts forth leaves in spring, which are of mouse-ear size, it is time to plant corn." Then the whip-poor-will has arrived and is continually hovering over them, calling out his Indian name *wekolis*, in order to remind them of the planting time, as if he said to them "hackiheck!" go to planting corn! (Heckewelder, Indian Nations, p. 307.) The Miami Indians will say, *ziwashiko'ko*! "Sow your seed!" In the same manner the cry of the cuckoo, first heard in May, has suggested many agricultural rules in proverb form to the European farmer.

The names given to the whip-poor-will by white people always convey some animistic idea, which makes them popular, jocular and easy to remember. Thus, the English language calls them whip-poor-will, in which the "poor William," or even the "whipping of the poor Will," is intended for a malignant slur; also "chuck-Will's-widow" of the Southern States, though here we do not know who is going to chuck (choke) her. In the North he is sometimes called: "Breath stinks awful," "No more snow," "No buckskin horses," and German-Americans will say, "Hans, hack Holz." So the Brazilians call it in Portuguese João [cor-ta pão, "John chops wood," or *manha eu vou*, "to-morrow I am going."*

Spanish-Americans call the goat-sucker *chotacabra*, and the smaller species of the whip-poor-will "chotacabra chillona;" they modify the English term into *juipoil*, *juipuruil*. *Madrugador*, or "early riser," is another Spanish term used in Mexico, and an ancient Mexican town mentioned in the Codex of Mendoza is Zacuan-tepec, from *zacuan*, the Nahuatl name for the bird, which means "rising early." The pictorial way to express the idea is the picturing of two feathers fastened in front and two above the usual sign for "on a hill," *tepec*, because the wind blowing through these feathers produces the same sound as the *madrugador* in his early chant. (A. Peñafiel, *nombres Mexicanos*, p. 254.)

Follows an enumeration of the whip-poor-will's names in various languages of America, which is not as full as could be desired. The majority of collectors of vocabularies do not think to inquire after terms so special as this, and much less do they try to establish distinctions between the different species of a genus of natural history and to inquire for the names of both.

The languages of the *Algonkin* family, spoken in southeastern

* Karl v. d. Steinen, *Naturvölker Brasiliens*, 1894, p. 83.

Canada and in the northern and northeastern parts of the United States, have yielded the following appellations:

In the Micmac dialect—wikwelitch.

In Menomonee—waípona.

In Shawano—kokolathí.

In Arápahu—bixananêhi; in the plural, bixanenâhiha.

In Peoria and Miami—ókuya or úkuya, wi'kuwé; is also the name for April or May, when the whip-poor-will is first heard.

In Ojibwe—gwengwawia and wahúnase.

In Long Island and Delaware—whakóris or wekólis.

The *Iroquois* languages of the State of New York differ but little in their terms. To pronounce words of this family correctly is not an easy matter, and hence I add the following directions: the sign ' or apostrophe denotes an explosive noise; the underlined r, r, is a trilled sound; the other r is the common English r. The ⁿ superior indicates nasalizing. X is the *ch* of Greek. My information was derived from a native of the Tuscarora tribe, J. N. B. Hewitt, of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

In the Tuscarora dialect—kwä'kúryeⁿ.

In Seneca—kwä'ngónyeⁿ.

In Cayuga—kwa'koryeⁿ.

In Mohawk—kwa'koryeⁿ.

In Onondaga—kweⁿkó'hyeⁿ.

In Oneida—kwä'kolyeⁿ.

In the cognate Cherokee language we have wágulí, perhaps borrowed from the Algonkin term.

Of the *Maskoki* dialects, once spoken throughout the Gulf States, and even now heard in some remote counties there, I have obtained only the following onomatopoeias:

Dialect of Creek or Maskoki proper—tchukpilápila, or tsukbélábela; the smaller species waxkúla, from which is named Wakulla, a locality in northern Florida.

Dialect of Seminoles—sukbalámbala.

Dialects of Hitchiti and Koassáti—tchokbilábili.

Dialect of Alibamu—tchukanábila.

The *Yuchi* Indians, who speak an entirely different tongue, call the bird tchuspalakwáni, and the *Natchez*, also allophylic, name it tukpupúhu.

The *Dakota* languages, as far as I could learn from the specialist, Rev. J. O. Dorsey, all use the same term, hakugdhi, except the Sioux or Dakota proper, where pakúwishka is in use. The *dh* of this language-family is the *dh* sonant of Anglo-Saxon, the counterpart to the *th* sound of Anglo-Saxon and of modern English, hákugdhi in the Omaha and Ponka dialects.

hákule in Kansa or Kaw.

hakuñkdhe in Osage.

hékuktthi in Kwapa or Quapaw.

When the Ponka Indians quote the full note of the bird they

use the sentence: "hákugdhi, háhugdhi, adshá^a!" Accented syllables are here sung rather staccato than crescendo.

In other North American languages I obtained the whip-poor-will's name only for a few; so the *Nes Percés*, or Sahaptins, on Middle Columbia river and in Idaho, call it wauwéyuk, the *Klamaths* of southwestern Oregon kiwash or giwash, with explosive initial sound, while the children's name among the Kayowé is pábi, or "younger brother." The *Zuñi* Indians of New Mexico possess different names for it (F. H. Cushing). One of these is used only in their mythic and legendary stories: kwakwátli nóna, "the one who does or cries the kwakwátli," this being a purely onomatopoetic term. Another is áwatin 'lána (thlána), to be rendered by "great mouther," "babbler," "blatherskite;" 'lána being *great, much of*, áwati, the abbreviation of awatinnek, *using the mouth*. This bird is frequent in that country and so sacred to these Indians that at night it takes the place of the eagle.

The above is a small specimen only of what Indians can do in onomatopoeia. Their languages are more given to this form of synthesis than those of Europe, and a large number of animal names and sound imitating verbs could be mentioned for comparison. Thus, the wren is called in Omaha, kixéxetcha, "laughing bird"; the prairie-dog, who with his thin, squeaking voice, tells people to come to him, pispiza, "come here," in the Sioux dialect. The katydid is called in the Illinois dialects of Algonkin: kakákia; the mocking bird is called in Wichita, itchírish wákëre (itchírish means *bird*); in Cheyenne, wí-i-i, plural, wi-i-ihu; in Omaha, tadhtaka.

In the *American Anthropologist*, VII, 68-70, 1895, Dr. A. F. Chamberlain has published an instructive list of sound-words obtained from the Kitunaha Indians on the Canadian boundary line: animal calls and cries, human cries and noises, noises in nature, which presents many analogies with the whip-poor-will's names.

